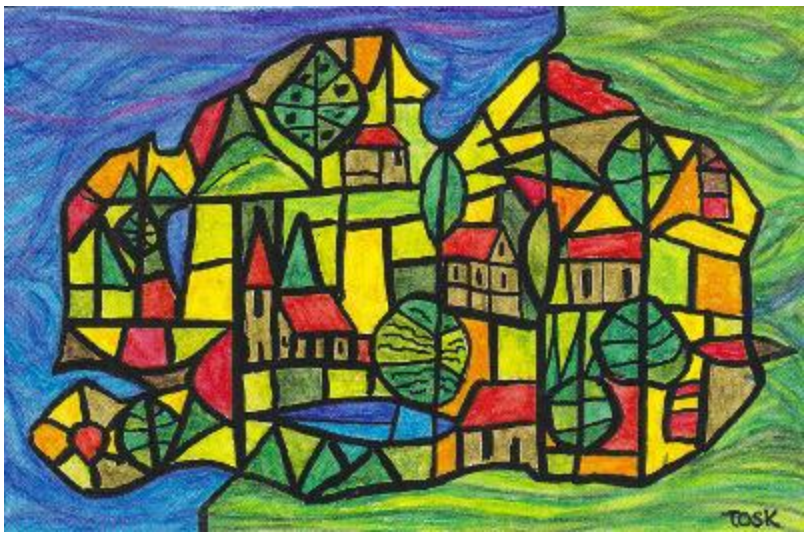


Alphistia *zine*

By Anthony Skaggs

Q and A

Who?

Alphistia would consist of me and about 175,000 of my closest friends, who would live together some years from now, and create a new society of their own.

What?

Alphistia now is a geofiction, or a new country project, a model country, or a mythology with a manifesto, among other things... It's about a place in my mind’s eye, documented on paper and on the web.

When?

Alphistia has had several “eras”. First there was the Alphistia I created as a boy (1967-74) that included a “real” aspect of

child's play. That was mostly just me adapting what I learned from books and tv to create a world of my own in my backyard. Since my teen years, I've imagined Alphistia even more, and wrote much of it down or drew my depictions of it. Now I focus on an Alphistia of the near future, about 20 years from now. It would be a small place "under the radar", in a world that had become semi-post-apocalyptic.

Why?

I've always needed a place to go to: a "secret garden", a Narnia, a Middle Earth, a utopia. When I was a boy in the late 60s, I lived in a home with a lot of turmoil. I invented Alphistia to get away from there, and it worked! I even created a "real-existing" Alphistia in the backyard, and neighborhood kids got involved. Politics made that an early lesson about the "real world"! By 1974, Alphistia became virtual and has stayed that way. I imagine it though in the near future as an alternative and a refuge from a new "Dark Ages", which I call the "Klava".

Where?

That has not been decided. At least not for the near-future model I focus on nowadays. The closest I've come to declaring a location is that it would be in the Northwest of the North American continent, above the current Canadian border with the USA.

How?

That is a small wrench in the machinery...I am terrible at politics! I go into hiding at the first warning signs of conflict, like a hermit crab. Instead, I've simply documented and

archived what I've imagined. Perhaps it can inspire some very clever individuals who will read these documents. They would set up Alphistia when the inevitable Klava arrives. In that scenario, I have survived as the founder emeritus and live out my days in the country I “discovered”.

The Collapse: Klava

Klava is an Alphistian word meaning "decay and collapse". The origin of the word itself is unknown, but I used it in the mid-1970s to describe the anxiety of living in a dangerous world. Fear of nuclear war and massive economic and environmental problems were part of daily life then. While the Soviet empire collapsed in the years that followed, the world is still in trouble. Now there are not just the problems from climate change, pandemics, authoritarian leaders, the failures of a globalized economy, and a continuing nuclear threat, but also potential for even more upheaval. Klava it seems, is back.

This could result in another Dark Ages. The era of globalization would end, resulting in many fewer economic links and much higher levels of political tension. Many countries could go into steep decline, and it is highly unlikely the USA would be exempt from this. Borders would be redrawn in countries far too large to be able to sustain themselves economically and politically.

In such a vacuum, somewhere like Alphistia could come into being. While many around the world would struggle to restore what the Klava disrupted or destroyed, Project Alphistia would put into action plans to create a new society. On a small scale, and from their own efforts, Alphistians would show a way forward.

It would be a country different from the current model. It would not have a petroleum-based economy, but would instead rely on electrical power from renewable resources. It would be largely self-sufficient in food production and the provision of most goods and services for everyday life. It would not measure quality of life based on abstract growth statistics. In many ways there would instead be a steady-state system. Politically, Alphistia would be a democratic and self-governing nation. And Alphistia would

welcome immigrants from around the world, who are committed to the ideals of the Alphistian project, and willing to learn the Alphistian language.

A post-Klava world however, is likely to be just as dangerous as the one that came before it. If a new Dark Ages develops, that would be all the more reason to establish Alphistia.

Arisen from the Ruins

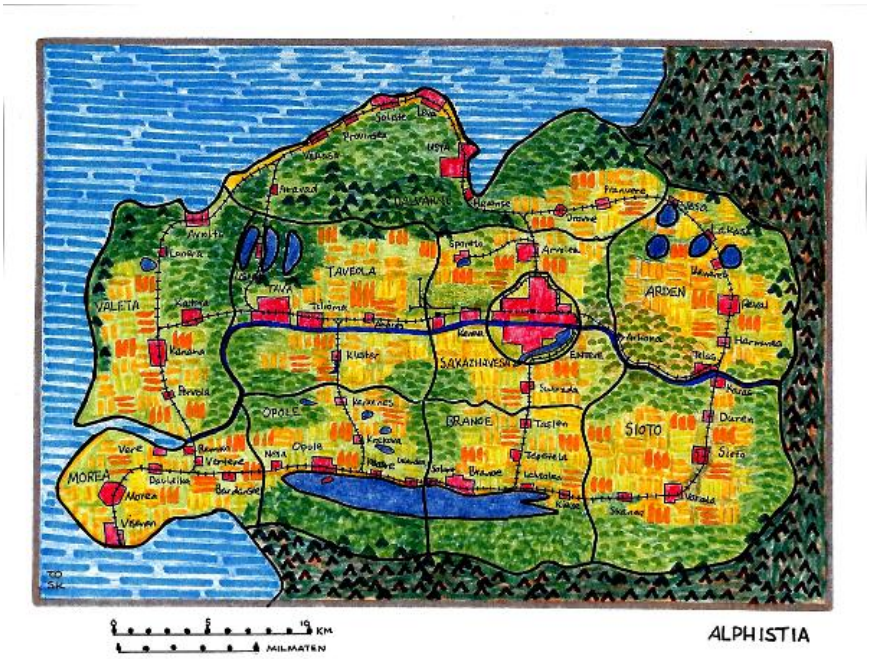
Project Alphistia would be a group of like-minded people who would leave behind the chaos and insecurity all around them, and move somewhere new to build a society according to their own ideals. They would call this homeland “Lesenum”, and they would call the country they want to create “Alphistia”.

The end of the Roman Empire was followed by what we nowadays call the “Dark Ages”. It was not the end of civilization, although many examples of barbarism could be cited from this period. The main feature of the centuries following the collapse of the Roman Empire was that there was no longer a central authority and the stability that it provided.

The Dark Ages had glimmers of light, for example: monasteries. The monastic communities preserved (some) of the learning of the past, and provided stability and subsistence to many who otherwise had little chance of survival. The state was very weak or non-existent, and it was centuries before Charlemagne’s Empire came into existence in just one part of the former Roman Empire, and it did not last for very long. Eventually the feudal system evolved, but that would hardly be a model for future societies.

In our own near future, out of the ruins of former powerful countries, new and smaller societies could develop. Alphistia would not be a monastery or order of monks, but a small nation-state that would seek to preserve the knowledge of the past, build upon it, and provide a secure and stable life for those who could make their way to its territory. Alphistia would be secular and its “gods” would be knowledge and learning.

Whatever land Alphistia could obtain for itself in the vacuum of the Klava would be much smaller than the nation states of today. Defending a small amount of land would be easier and more likely successful than for a country with an area larger than a thousand square kilometers. A post-Collapse world would likely be just as dangerous as the era that came before it. There would surely be Vandals and Huns of a new type. Alphistia would have to be able to defend itself, unlike the unarmed monks of old. The smaller the land area, the easier it would be to protect.



A New Country

Alphistia is a country in search of both land and people.

All the territory in the world is today claimed by nation states, although new countries have been formed or proclaimed in recent years, peacefully or not. Existing nations are jealous of their territory, no matter how small, but Alphistia would only come into existence by peaceful means. The challenges are great for a new-country project such as Alphistia, and this fact is acknowledged and accepted. Through persuasion and negotiation however, it is hoped that Alphistia can acquire its own small territory.

A country must also have people to live in it. In the case of Alphistia, this would happen through people from all around the world choosing to come to live there. Alphistia would not be imposed on people already in a particular place. It would be a new land with a new society and culture, which in the Alphistian language is called the “Lesenum” (a word that means “homeland” or “land of our own”).

Who is an Alphistian? The answer is very simple. If a person feels they are Alphistian, then they are.

This feeling comes from knowing and accepting the basic aspects of Project Alphistia: the desire to live in a society as described here, and to be open to learning and using the Alphistian language.

That of course, would mean that Alphistia would not be the ideal homeland for everybody. It would be a place for those who believe in a democratic, green, socially secure progressive state, with its own language and way of life.

Alphistia would welcome people of every racial and ethnic background, and from any country in the world. Alphistia would be multicultural, but with a unitary culture. Key to this process would be learning and using the Alphistian language.

A New Language and Culture

For a country like Alphistia, it would be fundamentally necessary to build a new cultural identity. The key to this would be the adoption of Alphistian as the official and everyday language.

It is not a simple task to invent, or to learn, a new language. The invention of Alphistian has been a 40 year plus project, and is still adding vocabulary to the simple grammar of the language. Alphistian is based on an Indo-European model, with influences particularly from the Scandinavian and Germanic languages. It has few exceptions grammatically,

an easy pronunciation and consistent spelling rules, and a vocabulary based on compounding root words.

An Imagined Geography

Compared to most countries in the world, Alphistia would be very small, both in size and population. Since the late 1980s, all my imagined maps of Alphistia show a place about the size of Singapore or England's Isle of Wight. From east to west, that would be about 24 miles(38 km), and 16 miles(26 km) from north to south. With nooks and crannies, it would be about 220 square miles (570 square km). Its population would be small as well: about 175,000 people.

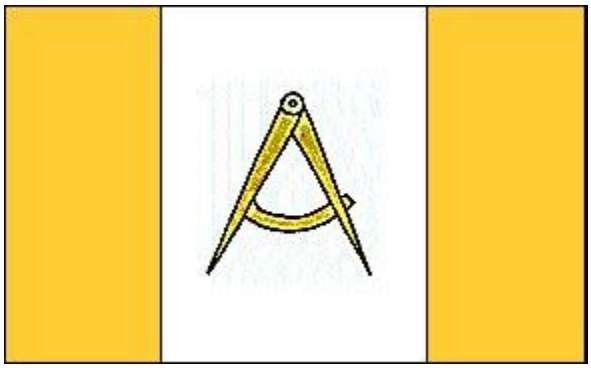
There would only be one "large" town: Enteve, the capital of the country, with 64,000 people. There would be several medium towns: Tava with 25,000 and Usta with 16,000. Altogether there would be nine provinces, each with a capital of between 5-10,000, with several dozen smaller towns and villages. Nearly all the communities would be connected to each other by electric trains, and Enteve would have a tram system (with several underground stations, making it the smallest subway system in the world). In the countryside, most farmers would live in villages, with their fields adjacent to their homes or right next to the built-up area. There would also be about a dozen agricultural co-ops, some modeled on the Israel kibbutz, but others modeled on the less communal Israeli moshav.

Although a small country, it would have a varied landscape. Its northern border would be on a big lake, the reservoir of a large hydroelectric dam to the east. The land would rise gradually to the south, meeting the uphills of mountains on the southern border. The Sioto River would run east to west through the country, emptying into a lake in the southwest.

Alphistia was formerly deeply forested, but a timber company had cleared some of the land, making it easier for Alphistian pioneers to set up towns, and to upgrade the trucking tracks into roads and railway lines.

The rivers and a number of lakes provide plenty of fish and recreational areas. This is true all along the shores of the northern reservoir too.

The “typical” landscape would be woods, with cleared areas for farms and settlements, without any suburban sprawl. Industries would be small-scale and designed to be unobtrusive. In this respect, Alphistia would again resemble England’s Isle of Wight: it would also be a “green and pleasant land”.



Alphistia’s Constitution and Government

Alphistia would be a constitutional republic, with a parliamentary system of government, elected by democratic means.

Governments exercise power, whether democratically, in authoritarian ways, or through dictatorship. Most people alive today do not live in democracies, and democracy itself is not a very old system in practice. While it is true that practice makes perfect, even in democratic societies, there is always the danger of an over-concentration of power, institutionalization of bureaucracy, and the development of unresponsive government. There are also the dangers of corruption and the cynical manipulation of popular opinion which undermine democracy. Not even the oldest, most powerfully democratic countries are immune to such decay from within.

In recent years, there has been growing tension between supranational institutions controlled largely by unelected

economic elites worldwide, and neo-nationalist political movements that draw on an ugly historical past. Globalization by its nature is undemocratic, particularly the dictatorship of “market forces”, and the inward-looking nativist movements exploited by nationalist politicians are hardly an acceptable alternative. In a very small way, Alphistia seeks to be an antidote to such poisonous developments.

Alphistians would choose their own system. They would have a democratic system based on the best practices of the past and present. The chief advantage would be Alphistia’s small size: a population small enough to be accountable to its citizens, through their elected representatives. Local government in particular, would allow for direct citizen participation. Economically, it would participate in globalization on our own terms, to its own advantage. Socially, it would develop a way of life and culture that complements its citizens’ shared values based on community, humanism, and the well-being of its people.

The Alphistian Constitution’s preamble begins:

“We are a nation, and we call our country Alphistia. We come from many lands to create a new society, and provide ourselves lives of freedom, justice, order, and prosperity.”

It is the basic law for Alphistia, prepared in advance for the nation’s use upon its founding. It is modeled on democratic constitutions of other countries, in particular the USA, Canada, and Germany. In Alphistian, the document is known as “De Anselrit” (The First Law).

The Constitution clearly states that Alphistia is a republic, with the source of power coming from elected assemblies. The primary institution of government is the national parliament, which is called the Kilrete. Elections are democratic between competing political parties, with seats apportioned in the Kilrete by proportional representation. Elections must be held every four years.

A government is formed by one or more parties with at least 50% of all seats in the Kilrete. The leader of the largest party in the coalition is the leader of the government, and is called the Spor. The Spor is President and Prime Minister of Alphistia. He/she appoints a cabinet from the parties in the government, called the Stat Rad. The Stat Rad consists of all the heads of the ministries (there are 16 of them), plus the Spor.

Local assemblies in the provinces and towns (called “Samenten”) elect members in similar ways, although village councils are generally non-partisan.

The Stat Kort is the supreme court of Alphistia. Because of the country’s small size, it hears cases of national importance, as well as appeals from provincial courts. It consists of five judges, nominated by the national lawyers association, appointed by the Spor, and confirmed by the Kilrete. Its primary role is to apply the Ritkoda (Law Code) according to constitutional principles. The Alphistian Constitution is considered to be a clear document which does not need continuous interpretation by judges as if they were oracles. Juries are not a part of the Alphistian legal system, and the death penalty and torture are forbidden.

The Charter of Citizen Rights gives each Alphistian many human rights: equality before the law without regard to race, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, or religious belief. There is freedom of speech, press, and privacy at home and in the workplace, and written and electronic correspondence is protected from government inspection except when ordered by the Stat Kort.

Citizens may protest peacefully, and if arrested for any reason, must be charged within 24 hours or be released. Citizens are not required to incriminate themselves, and defense attorneys must be available. Alphistians are free to own their own businesses, and if in need, to be provided housing by the government.

The Charter of Social Rights gives citizens the right to organize and be members of labor unions and political parties, and other organizations of civil society. Adult citizens have a right to a basic income during unemployment, disability, while studying in college, or when retired. There are guarantees for paid vacation, sick leave, maximum work hours, and a right to employment or retraining when needed. Same sex marriage is legal, and freedom to be religious (or not) is guaranteed. Articles 64-67 regulate religious institutions to guarantee separation of church and state. Divorce and abortion are legal, and women have equal rights to men. Guns are strictly regulated.

The Alphistian Constitution may be amended by the Kilrete, but any proposed changes must be approved by three fourths of its members, and confirmed by three fourths of the voters in a referendum. Non-citizens in Alphistia are treated according to international norms of human rights.

Building the Lesenum

When the day comes that Alphistians can start building their new country, they will need to have a plan. Project Alphistia will develop an Action Plan for this, providing the details for building the infrastructure and a timetable for settling Alphistia.

Alphistia's pioneers will lay the foundations for the new society. They will harness the streams, build the windmills, and install the solar panels to provide the energy Alphistia will need. They will build the electrical power plants and lay the grid for providing electricity to every part of the country.

The pioneers will build the railway and roads, and begin the construction of Alphistia's towns and villages, as well as the factories where the many of the settlers will work.

A phased program of immigration would send the settlers to where they are most needed and where housing is ready for them. It will be essential to coordinate these plans with the

arrival of Alphistia's citizens.

Wind, Sun, and Water Power

Alphistia would not be dependent on oil to operate its economy, but would make use of the most natural resources we have on this earth - wind, sun, and water.

Enormous amounts of electricity can be generated from windmills, solar panels, and running water. The technology already exists, but in most of the world, the will is not there to convert already existing power generating systems to clean, natural sources.

By creating an electric economy from clean energy sources, Alphistians could live in pleasant, green environments, with the needs of everyday life very near to them in pedestrian-oriented shopping districts. They could catch an electric bus or tram there that connects to the center of town and all the other neighborhoods. The center of town would have all the stores, services and cultural institutions a citizen needs, plus the main railway station connecting to all the other towns and villages in the country. In Alphistia, nowhere would be much more than one hour from anywhere else.

In this kind of environment, a person could easily choose not to own a car. For those who want or need one, they could buy one of three electric-powered models made in Alphistia. All of Alphistia's motor vehicles would be electric. Because the country would be very small, there would be no need for batteries that run for great lengths of time, and just like cars using gasoline need to stop to fill up the tank, electric cars could make use of the network of electric battery "refueling" stations. It would be just like changing a battery for a flashlight or cassette player - pop out the old battery that can be recharged in the station for other travellers, and pop in the fully charged battery which can run for another 80-100 km.

Industry would also make use of the clean energy provided

by wind, sun, and water. Larger factories could have their own generators, just as homes could have their own solar roof panels and windmills. This would make much energy costs very low for enterprises and citizens.

Sun, wind, and water sources are the cleanest ways to generate energy. There would be no car or industrial pollution, no smokestacks, no coal fires and certainly no dangerous nuclear energy.

Alphistia would not be breaking new ground by creating and developing a clean, green economy. The methods are already well-known, but most countries are so tied to the oil-based system, they are unable to make a big change. Alphistia would start from the ground up as a natural energy country, and Alphistians would be willing to make some small sacrifices in order to have a very high quality of life.

A Niche Economy

Alphistia would choose to have a higher quality of life instead of a flood of cheap goods imported from countries where workers are mercilessly exploited and children are forced to assemble toys. Due to the Klava, international supply chains would be permanently disrupted, and trade would be limited with faraway countries.

Globalization was good in certain limited respects, but it is more worthwhile to give Alphistians the opportunity to make as many of their own food products and consumer goods as they can, instead of hitching on to a gigantic outside economy based on the lowest common denominator of prices and wages. The dignity of man is lost in that process.

Globalization was unsustainable in the long run, because too many people lost out along the way. Supply chains were too long and brittle, and the workforces in distant underdeveloped countries were exploited for quick profit.

Economics as if people mattered would be the choice made by Alphistia. In some respects, this would result in a different

way of living for Alphistians. They would not be locked into a permanent “ratrace” for profits and growth. Alphistians might not be as up-to-date as far as fashions and trends go, but at least they could conserve their resources for what stands the test of time.

The bottom-line and race-to-the-bottom mentality of neoliberal global capitalism would not be the path taken by Alphistia, but rejected as an outdated and unsustainable system.

Cooperatives and Small Businesses

Alphistia would not be a local branch economy of global multinational corporations. It would develop its own economic enterprises, employing Alphistian workers.

Alphistia’s own businesses would be primarily small or medium-sized. In the retail sector, there would be many family businesses, what are familiarly known as mom-and-pop shops. These small-scale companies are proven providers of quality customer service. They are especially good at operating restaurants, neighborhood grocery stores or providing repair services.

Larger companies producing goods and services would be encouraged to form as profit-making cooperatives, although private enterprises could also exist. The model would be the extremely successful Mondragon Cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain. These are profitable production co-ops which also run their own distribution centers and retail chains. They have also exported many of their products throughout Europe, especially electronics and consumer appliances.

Mondragon Co-ops have their own investment bank, and economic decisions are made by an elected board (elected by the members of the co-op), which appoints managers of the various enterprises. A certain amount of the co-op’s profit is invested in new technology or expansion projects, while the rest is given as dividends to the members. These are in

addition to the wages they earn working in Mondragon's enterprises.

Alphistia's small economy would be ideal for such a system, with the added advantage being economic democracy. Instead of being answerable to shareholders (where the golden rule applies: "he who has the gold rules"), in co-ops, the system is one member-one vote.

Labour unions would of course be legal in Alphistia, to keep all the economic enterprises honest and accountable to workers.

In Alphistia, every worker would be protected by the stipulations of the Social Charter articles of the Alphistian Constitution, and further legislation made by the Kilrete - Alphistia's parliament.

All Alphistians would have access to health insurance, not just those employed by companies that could afford to provide it. All Alphistians would have a pension when they retire, or if they become disabled. This pension would cover the basic expenses a person would need to pay for a quality standard of living. For those who want more income, all citizens could pay extra into an annuity system. This would pay out at a guaranteed rate upon retirement or disability, supplements to the basic pensions provided by the state.

If a citizen becomes unemployed, they would not lose their health insurance. They would collect an unemployment benefit equal to the basic pension described above. If a suitable job cannot be found, retraining programs and paid internships would be available.

A Secure Society

Ordinary people want and need a degree of security in their lives, just as much as they want and need autonomy. One without the other is a recipe for personal and social disaster. Modern American life emphasizes autonomy over security, and conventional wisdom pretends that this is normal.

Every other advanced industrialized country except the US has provided national health insurance, guaranteed paid vacations, paid maternity leave, and many other programs that many Americans have thought were socialist. Obviously Japan, Switzerland, the countries of Western Europe, and all the other advanced countries are neither socialist. These countries made the choice to balance autonomy and security and still have a high standard of living.

Alphistia would be like these countries.

That's why social security programs were created: in order to spread risks that we all experience throughout society. Insurance companies spread risk for life insurance or against accidents amongst all their policy holders, who pay premiums. At the state level, premiums are replaced by taxes, and unlike private insurance companies, the state does not (or should not) exclude people.

When a society makes these social policies, the payoff is that people feel more secure. They can then concentrate on other aspects of life other than fears that if they become ill they will be bankrupted, that they will be fired if they ever take a day off work, or that they must work until the day they die.

Culture and Life

The creation of the Lesenum would mean a new culture and way of life. The ideas and ideals of Project Alphistia could be realized for the citizens of the new society

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Alphistia would emphasize the need for learning throughout life, not just for children and young people preparing for careers. Adult education programs would be available at very low cost (or free) through a network of folkschools and cultural centers. These classes would not be just for staying up-to-date with technology or job-related skills, but to enlighten and entertain all those who like to learn new things.

Every town would have its own House of Culture, with a library, classrooms for crafts, the arts, and lectures, and an auditorium for larger gatherings. The capital Enteve would have its own central House of Culture and a network of neighborhood branches.

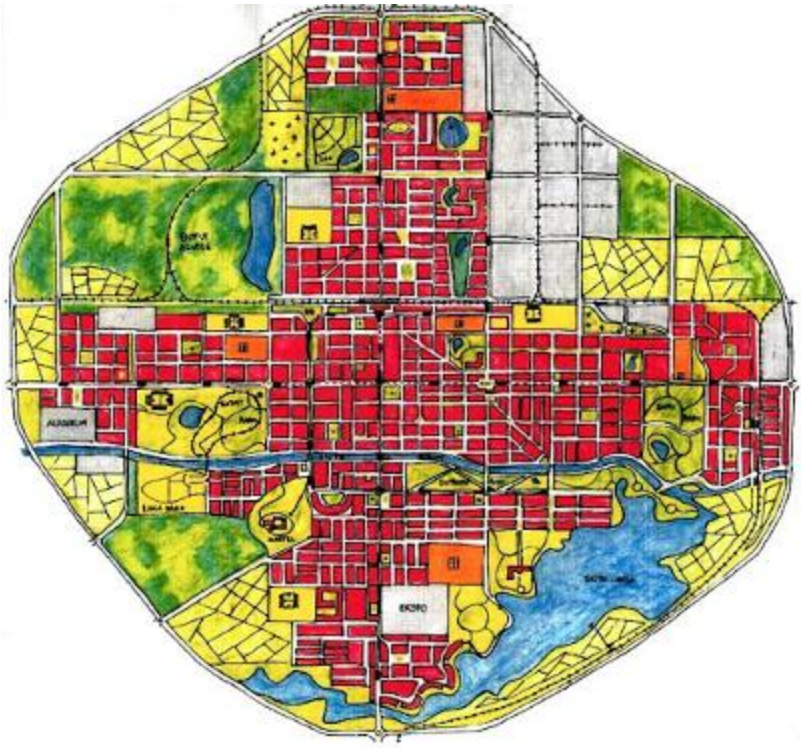
Connected with these cultural centers would be leisure centers for sports and games in each town. A typical center would have an indoor gymnasium, an indoor/outdoor swimming pool, playing fields for football and other sports, as well as tennis/volleyball courts etc. These would be available to all in the community, not just those paying for memberships in private associations or clubs.

Folkschools would be residential or commuter learning centers for adults. Some would be located in towns, but others would be situated in scenic spots in the country. Workers would be provided with periodic sabbaticals to take courses at these schools.

A network of spas and rest homes would also be available at reasonable cost, also located in areas outside the towns. Some would focus on rehabilitative cures, and other simply to provide relaxation for their guests.

Private gardens, weekend cottages, and do-it-yourself projects would also be emphasized. These pursuits would provide leisure and productive outlets for many and a direct connection with nature.

Alphistians would live in a society that would balance work, learning, and leisure. Overwork hurts individuals, families and society, and is not as productive as a balanced life. Little is gained from artificial stress, and a great part of the difference between Alphistia and many other societies would be the less stressful aspects of everyday life in the Lesenum. The increase in general healthiness, longevity, and personal satisfaction would be worth a slightly lower gross domestic product.



To the Future

It isn't possible to predict the future, but recent trends do not indicate that the coming years will be stable, secure, and prosperous. There is no guarantee a place like Alphistia will exist, but it is some comfort at least to imagine it.

Written and published as a zine in October 2021,
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